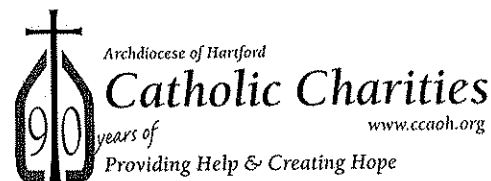


March 4, 2011
Senator Toni Harp, Co-Chair
Representative Toni E. Walker, Co-Chair
Members of the Appropriations Committee



Testimony regarding Governor's proposed FY'12 Budget- Nurturing Families

Catholic Charities operates Nurturing Families programs in three Hartford Family Centers, providing home visiting services to **over 120 economically disadvantaged, primarily minority families annually**. Fragile young moms and their newborn infants depend upon these critical services. **Prevention of child abuse MUST be a top priority in Connecticut.** Child abuse is a public problem that affects every single Connecticut resident.

Substantiated child abuse claims in Connecticut have decreased dramatically due in large part to programs that include Nurturing Families. Data informs us that about 22% of the more than 3,000 new high-risk mothers and infants within the existing program sites would end up as DCF cases for investigative, protective and legal actions mandated by law. Each case costs the state about \$30,000 per year.

Research documents that home visits have significant influence on parenting practices, the quality of the child's home environment, and children's development. Studies also show that home visiting programs such as Nurturing Families have their greatest benefits for the most vulnerable families: those often headed by low-income, first-time adolescent mothers.

It is important that the Nurturing Families Programs remain community based. There is a level of trust that has been established that breaks down the barriers to providing services to our client base. Family Centers meet people in their own communities and provide a variety of other critical support services including childcare, adult education, basic human needs services and other services. Therefore, community-based programs reduce the reliance on costly child protective services.

Furthermore, the Nurturing Families program has a demonstrated ability to attract additional resources to Connecticut. Two of Catholic Charities' Nurturing Families sites have received the national awards from the Annie E. Casey Foundation/Catholic Charities USA Family Strengthening Program. Catholic Charities Family Centers, which also provide the Nurturing Family Community Based Home Visiting Program, is the only organization to have received this distinction twice, with these two awards alone attracting \$50,000 to Connecticut.

Our understanding is that eliminating funding for NFN Home Visiting will disqualify Connecticut from receiving \$12 million over five years as part of a new federal Home Visiting Program designed to expand this very service. It requires a Maintenance of Effort consistent with March 2010 funding levels to qualify for additional funding. In Connecticut, this translates to maintaining NFN funding as 95% of its current rate.

We encourage you to continue funding community-based home visiting through the Nurturing Family Network for these critical and cost effective preventive and proactive services which protect our most vulnerable citizen pre-natal and newborn babies.

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